



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Hungry Horse and Glacier View
Ranger Districts
(406) 387-3800
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8975 Highway 2 East
P.O. Box 190340
Hungry Horse, MT 59919

File Code: 1950

Date: June 25, 2004

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Robert-Wedge Post Fire Project has been completed and is now available for public review and comment.

The Robert-Wedge Post Fire Project is located on the Glacier View Ranger District, Flathead National Forest. Proposed activities occur within and adjacent to the Wedge Canyon and Robert fire areas, which burned from July through September 2003. The Wedge Canyon and Robert fire areas are located 40 miles and 8 miles north of Columbia Falls, Montana, respectively. The Wedge Canyon Fire burned approximately 54,404 acres, 21,526 acres of which were National Forest System lands located in the northern portions of the Glacier View Ranger District. The Robert Fire burned 52,874 acres, 13,132 acres of which were National Forest System lands located in the southern portions of the Glacier View Ranger District.

This project proposal will be conducted under Title IV – The Flathead and Kootenai National Forest Rehabilitation Act, which was included in the Department of Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2004 and approved by President Bush in November 2003. One of the provisions of this Act states that if an EIS is required, the Flathead National Forest shall not be required to study, or develop, or describe any alternative to the proposed agency action. As a result of this legislation, the DEIS analyzes the proposed action and the no action alternative.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the Robert-Wedge Post Fire Project is to recover merchantable wood fiber affected by the Robert and Wedge Canyon Fires in a timely manner to support local communities and contribute to the long term yield of forest products; and to implement activities within the fire areas that will aid in the recovery of desired vegetation and site conditions.

Proposed Activities

Proposed activities include:

- Salvage 5800 acres through the use of helicopters, cable, or ground-based systems.
- Construct several miles of temporary roads to access some of the salvage units. These temporary roads would then be rehabilitated after logging activities.
- Plant trees on approximately 1350 acres within salvage units. Outside of proposed salvage units, planting of various tree and shrub species would also take place.
- Use pheromone-based treatments to help address potential bark beetle outbreaks as a result of fire damage to trees.
- Change road access in 2 grizzly bear subunits to improve grizzly bear security. Approximately 5 miles of open yearlong/seasonally open roads would be closed yearlong to wheeled motorized access, and 15 miles of road would be decommissioned. The Flathead Forest Plan has open motorized access, total motorized access, and security core standards that would be proposed for a Forest Plan amendment specific to this project.



Exemption of Stay

To expedite the removal of merchantable wood products, the Responsible Official (Forest Supervisor Cathy Barbouletos) for this project will submit a request to the Regional Forester and subsequently to the Chief of the Forest Service asking him to determine that an emergency situation exists in the two fire areas. If this determination is made, certain timber salvage activities would not be subject to stay on appeal, and sale advertisement and award could commence immediately following approval of the Record of Decision.

Availability of DEIS

Some of you responded to our letter in May which asked people to tell us what document format they prefer (i.e. CD, summary, or the paper copy version of the DEIS). If you did not indicate a preference, then you will only receive this cover letter; however, if you responded to this prior letter, then you will find enclosed the document in the format type you requested. If you requested the document on CD, the various sections of the DEIS have been divided in such a way we hope will make it small enough for most computers to handle. However, if you find that your computer cannot handle the size of the document, please contact us and we will mail you a hard copy. Also, the document was formatted on the CD in Adobe Acrobat Reader. If you have an older machine, you may have trouble reading our document with older versions of this software. You can obtain free updated versions by going to the Adobe Acrobat web site at: <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>. Follow the instructions on the screen for your computer.

To request the DEIS, contact Kathy Ramirez at 208-331-5908 (T.E.A.M.S, 161 East Mallard Drive, Suite A, Boise, ID 83706) or by e-mail kramirez@fs.fed.us. A DEIS may also be picked up at the Hungry Horse Ranger Station (8975 Hwy 2 East, Hungry Horse, MT 59919; 406-387-3800) or at the Flathead National Forest Supervisor's Office (1935 3rd Ave. East, Kalispell, MT 59901; 406-758-5200). The DEIS will also be available for viewing and downloading on the Flathead National Forest website at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/flathead/nepa/nepa.htm>.

How to Submit Comments

Comments on this DEIS are requested from you and other reviewers. The Responsible Official will consider all public comments before making a decision. In submitting comments, please provide specific facts along with supporting reasons that you believe should be considered by the Responsible Official in reaching a decision. Comments may be submitted in writing, orally, or through electronic means. In order to retain your administrative appeal rights, you must provide timely, substantive written, oral, or electronic comments during this 45-day comment period. Comments must be postmarked or received within the 45 days from the date the notice of availability (NOA) was published in the Federal Register. We expect the NOA to be published in the Federal Register on June 25, 2004. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection.

Send written comments to:

Jimmy DeHerrera, District Ranger,
Robert-Wedge Post-Fire Project,
Glacier View Ranger District,
P.O. Box 190340, Hungry Horse, MT 59919
(phone: 406-387-3800; fax:406-387-3889). Business hours are from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm.

Written comments must be postmarked by the Postal Service, e-mailed, faxed, or otherwise submitted by 11:59 p.m. on the 45th calendar day following publication in the Federal Register. Hand delivered comments must be time and date imprinted at the correct Responsible Official's office by the close of business on the 45th calendar day following publication in the Federal Register. We expect the date for closing the public comment period to be **August 10, 2004**.

Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone or in person, or if during non-business hours, must be at an official agency function (such as a public meeting) which is designed to elicit public comment.

Electronic comments may be submitted to **comments-northern-flathead-hungry-horse-glacier-view@fs.fed.us**. The subject line must contain the name of the project for which you are submitting comments. Acceptable formats are MS Word, Word Perfect or RTF. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

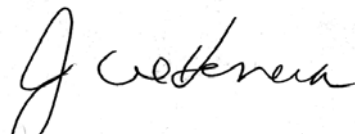
Field Trip

We plan to hold a public field trip on Saturday, July 17th and Wednesday, July 21st to visit portions of the fire areas. It is likely that we will be out most of the day. We will be arranging transportation since parking in the fire area is limited. Seating is limited so pre-registration is necessary. Please call 387-3800 to register for the field trip (please indicate the day you are interested in attending) during normal Monday-Friday, 8:00 am to 4:30 pm. Please wear appropriate clothing; bring lunch, water, binoculars, and cameras, if you wish. The **deadline** to register for the field trip is **noon on Friday, July 9th**.

To obtain additional information about this project, contact Kathy Ramirez at (208) 331-5908, kramirez@fs.fed.us, or Michele Draggoo at (406) 387-3827.

Thanks for your interest in this project and I look forward to receiving your comments.

Sincerely,



JIMMY J. DEHERRERA
District Ranger

Enclosure